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ABSTRACT

The Dual Employed Coping Scales (DECS) were developed to measure coping behaviors and patterns of dual-employed families. The original DECS (58 self-report items) was administered to a sample of 60 individuals in dual-employed families. In another study, in which 69 dual-employed couples completed the DECS and the Family Adaptability and Cohesion Scales, factor analytic procedures for the DECS yielded 49 items with internal reliability and 4 patterns of coping: (1) maintaining, restructuring, and strengthening the family system; (2) procurement of support to maintain family roles; (3) modifying roles and standards to maintain work/family balance; and (4) maintaining a positive perspective on the lifestyle and reducing tension and strains. Analysis of DECS data suggested gender role differentiation in dual-employed coping styles. Dual-employed wives used significantly more coping behaviors than their husbands, with much effort focused on accommodating their work to their family. Successful family adaptation also related to the wives' attempts to accommodate work to family, while the husbands' use of time for personal coping behaviors such as exercising appeared to interfere with family adaptation. Results of the study support the DECS as a tool for measuring dual-employed family coping behaviors. (MCF)

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COPING IN DUAL-EMPLOYED FAMILIES: SPOUSAL DIFFERENCES

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COPING IN DUAL-EMPLOYED FAMILIES: SPOUSAL DIFFERENCES

The dual-employed family has emerged as a very common lifestyle in the United States since 1970, partly in response to the cycle inflation and recession in our economy and partly in response to the changing roles of women. A significant feature of this lifestyle is that it produces considerable stress and strain. The often competing demands of the occupational structure and those of a full family life present a number of challenges for dual-employed families who are attempting to cope with the new "normative" stressors characteristic of this lifestyle.

While the literature has delineated numerous stressors associated with dual-employed living, we have only begun to carefully examine the coping behaviors of husbands and wives in managing this lifestyle. The purpose of this paper is to advance efforts aimed at systematically assessing dual-employed family coping repertoires. The Dual-Employed Coping Scales (DECS) is introduced as an instrument that attempts to identify and measure such coping behaviors and patterns. Findings obtained from the utilization of DECS in a study of dual-employed husband and wife coping and the relationship of this coping to family adaptation are also presented.

Dual-Employed Family Stress and Coping

Although there is considerable variation from one family to another in the types of stressors experienced and the ways in which they impact on dual-employed family members, there are also common patterns. The problem of work and role overload is an issue for many dual-employed families (Epstein, 1971; Garland, 1972; Heckman, Bryson & Bryson, 1977; Holmstrom, 1973; Rapoport & Rapoport, 1976; St. John-Parson, 1978). Strain experienced from traditional sex-role socialization and stereotyping running counter to the current wishes

and/or practices of dual-employed family members is another common stressor noted in the literature (Rapoport & Rapoport, 1976. Epstein, 1971; Bird, 1979). The rigidity of the occupational structure, scheduling issues, and social network dilemmas, (e.g., limitations on the availability of time and energy to maintain relationships outside the immediate family) are other stressors frequently noted as characterizing the dual-employed lifestyle (Holmstrom, 1973, Rapoport & Rapoport, 1976).

Just as the type and degree of strain experienced varies for dual-employed families, so do the strategies employed for managing the stress. Bebbington (1973) suggested that "stress optimization," the acknowledging of dual-employed family stress as inevitable and preferable to the stress of alternative life-styles available, is an orientation of many dual-employed couples. Defining their situation as such may serve as a resource in successful adaptation to the stress. Dual-employed couples also employ stress-mitigating strategies. These coping behaviors are aimed at maintaining or strengthening the family system and at securing support from sources external to the family.

Coping Behavior Within the Family System

Poloma (1972) outlined four tension-management techniques used by the dual-employed women in her study. They reduced dissonance by defining their dual-employed patterns as favorable or advantageous to them and their families when compared to other alternatives available. For instance, a career mother noted that she was a happier mother and wife because she worked outside the home than she would be if whe were a full-time homemaker. Secondly, they established priorities among and within their roles. The salient roles are familial ones and if a conflict situation occurs between family and career

demands, the family needs comes first. A third strategy employed was that of compartmentalizing work and family roles as much as possible. Leaving actual work and work-related problems at the office would be one way to segregate one's work and family roles. Finally, the women in Poloma's study managed strain by compromising career aspirations to meet other role demands.

Compromise is a common coping strategy noted in much of the dual-employment literature as a way of reducing stress and making the life-style manageable. Women, in particular, compromise employment goals if there are competing role demands (Bernard, 1974; Epstein, 1971; Heckman et al., 1977; Holmstrom, 1973). However, men in such families make career sacrifices also, e.g., compromising advancement opportunities in an attempt to reduce role conflict.

Prioritizing and compromising are coping strategies employed not only to deal with conflicts between roles but also in resolving competing demands with roles. Domestic overload, for instance, may be managed by deliberately lowering standards. One compromises ideal household standards because of constraints on time and energy in achieving them. Structurally, the domestic overload dilemma can also be managed within the family system by reorganizing who does what, with the husband and children taking on more of what traditionally has been the woman's responsibility. In these instances dual-employed families are <u>actively</u> employing coping behaviors within the family aimed at strengthening its functioning and, thus, reducing the family's vulnerability to stress (McCubbin, 1979).

Some individuals from dual-employed families take a more reactive orientation toward stress, and cope by attempting to manage and improve their behavior to better satisfy all of the life-style's demands. Holmstrom (1973) reported that the couples in her study adhered to organized schedules and that the women, in particular, were very conscious of how they allocated their time

and effort. Flexibility and control over one's schedule are highly valued by career persons in attempting to meet overload and time pressures.

Coping Behaviors Involving External Support Systems

Dual-employed couples also employ coping behaviors aimed at securing support outside the family to help reduce stress. Holmstrom (1973) reported that the dual-career couples she studied were quite willing to use money to help resolve overload strain. Hiring help, especially for child care, is a common expense in this life-style. Couples also buy time in various other ways, such as hiring outside help to do domestic work and purchasing labor- and time-saving devices.

Outside support in terms of friendships were also important to the couples in the Rapoports' study (1976). The dual-career couples formed friendships on a couple basis, associating with other career couples. "Friendships, while gratifying, are also demanding, and in many of the couples there was a relatively explicit emphasis on the mutual service aspects of the relationship as well as the recreational aspect" (Rapoport, p. 316). Thus, establishing friendships with couples like themselves helped to validate the life-style for these dual-career couples and provided a reciprocal support structure.

The literature suggests that dual-employed couples are increasingly interested in negotiating work arrangements that will reduce or remove some of this life-style's stress. Flexible scheduling, job sharing, and split-location employment are used by some families as coping mechanisms to reduce the family's vulnerability to overload stress.

While some attention has been given to dual-employed family coping strategies, as noted in the above-mentioned studies, our understanding of such behavior is far from systematic or complete. Therefore, a goal of the present study is to

advance this line of inquiry by systematically examining husband and wife coping in dual-employed families.

Dual-Employed Coping Scales (DECS)

Building upon the findings of the previously mentioned dual-employed family studies as well as significant coping research, DECS (Skinner and McCubbin, 1981) has been developed in an attempt to more systematically study the coping behaviors and patterns of dual-employed families. The original instrument consisted of 58 self-report items which spouses respond to individually. Each item addresses a specific coping behavior. During the initial stages of development DECS was administered to a sample of 60 individuals from dual-employed families in order to determine applicability, clarity, variance, and duplication of items.

Initial Normative Data

In a recent study of dual-employed family coping and adaptation with 69 couples, DECS was utilized to assess coping behaviors. Factor analytic procedures were used on the data from these couples (138 individuals) to determine underlying coping patterns. The four patterns that emerged from this process and the behavior items in each pattern with their factor loadings are listed in Table 1. The internal reliability of DECS composed of the 49 items from these four scales is .86.

Insert Table 1

The four patterns are:

I. Maintaining, Restructuring, and Strengthening the Family System. Items in this pattern focus on coping behaviors utilized both at work and at home which focus on family issues.

Internal Reliability = .72 (Chronbach's Alpha)

II. Procurement of Support to Maintain Family Roles.
This pattern consists of behaviors aimed at securing outside support, goods, and services and identifying responsibility for childrearing tasks

Internal Reliability = .74 (Chronbach's Alpha)

III. Modifying Roles and Standards to Maintain a Work/Family Balance.
These items address behaviors which attempt to accommodate work to family and family to work.

Internal Reliability = .78 (Chronbach's Alpha)

IV. Maintaining a Positive Perspective on the Lifestyle and Reducing Tensions and Strains.
Behaviors which attend to personal needs focused on reducing individual stress, and maintain an optimistic definition of the situation make up this scale.

Internal Reliability = .76 (Chronbach's Alpha)

The means and standard deviations from this sample of 138 husbands and wives are presented in Table 2. The intercorrelation matrix (Table 3) of the DECS scales was examined and the patterns were found to correlate moderately as might be expected with this type of instrument designed to assess dimensions of family life which are in reality related.

Insert Tables 2 and 3

Spousal/Gender Differences in Coping

Analysis of the DECS data suggests that this instrument may be quite useful as a predictor of male or female group membership and reveals spousal and/or gender role differentiation with regard to dual-employed coping styles. As a classification technique, DECS correctly classified 91.3% of the cases by sex. A discriminant analysis by sex of DECS revealed 16 behavior items significant at the .05 level. Significant differences between husbands and wives in terms

of coping patterns were also found on 2 of the 4 DECS Scales (Scales III, IV) and on the total instrument. These findings are presented in Table 4.

Insert Table 4

Examination of Table 4 reveals that wives employ coping behaviors and patterns to a greater extent than do husbands. Wives were significantly higher on their utilization of coping patterns aimed at modifying roles and standards (Coping Pattern III) and maintaining a positive perspective and reducing tension (Coping Pattern IV) than were husbands. The specific coping behaviors in Coping Patterns III and IV that wives used to a significantly greater degree than did their husband are presented in Tables 5 and 6.

Insert Tables 5 and 6

The findings presented in Table 5 suggest that wives, in particular, are actively involved in coping strategies which attempt to accommodate work to family. By limiting job involvement, modifying work schedules, and planning work changes around family needs, priority to the family becomes evident. It also appears evident that household roles and standards are modified by these wives in an attempt to maintain a work/family balance. The specific coping behaviors from Pattern IV which were used to a significantly greater extent for the wives in this sample focus on defining their situation in a positive way and maintaining flexibility.

Efficacy of Coping

As previously mentioned this study of dual-employed couples explored the relationship between dual-employed coping (as measured by DECS) and family adaptation (as measured by Family Adaptability and Cohesion Scales, FACES, Olson, Bell, and Portner, 1978). It was hypothesized that individuals with higher scores on all four DECS coping patterns would have "balanced" scores on FACES. ("Balanced" scores referring to moderate scores on the cohesion and adaptability subscales of FACES); whereas, individuals with lower scores on DECS would have "imbalanced" scores on FACES ("imbalanced" scores referring to scores falling in the extreme ranges of the cohesion and adaptability subscales of FACES).

The results reveal some interesting findings with regard to coping and family adaptation. Dual-employed wives attempts to modify roles and standards to maintain a work/family balance (Pattern III) appear most important in explaining differences between balanced and imbalanced families. A careful examination of the data indicated that the following coping behaviors wives engage in are significant in contributing to balanced families: 11) Specifically planning "family time together" into our schedule, 33) Modifying work schedule (e.g., reducing the amount of time at work or working different hours), and 45) limiting job involvement in order to have time for family.

For husbands, Coping Pattern IV, that of maintaining a positive perspective on the lifestyle and reducing tensions and strains is related to imbalanced family functioning. Insight into this surprising finding can be obtained by examining the specific behaviors which were found to be significant in this pattern. It appears that for dual-employed husbands: a) planning time for self to relieve tensions (jogging, exercising, meditating, etc.) and b) maintaining health (eating right, exercising) may be a potential source of stress

in these families. Perhaps the husbands' use of time for personal coping in these ways further strains a family already experiencing overload and, thus, interferes with adaptive behaviors that could help preserve family life.

Discussion

The findings of this exploratory study suggest that management of the dual-employed lifestyle calls for an orchestrated response utilizing a variety of coping behaviors. This appears to be particularly evident for women who reported greater use of coping behaviors than did their husbands. The spousal differences found in this study may be explained, in part, by previous dual-employed family stress literature which has indicated that the impact of the stress is felt most by women. Heckman, Bryson & Bryson (1977), in assessing problem areas for dual-employed couples, found that the women reported more problems in more areas than did men and that many of the comments about problem areas by husbands were issues that had indirectly affected them because the issue had directly affected their wives. Perhaps Bernard (1974) explained it best when she noted that a man can combine a career and parenting more easily than a woman because less is expected of the man with regard to familial responsibilities.

If we look at coping as the active responses that an individual engages in to manage stress, then the findings of this study suggest that dual-employed women in particular, are involved in this process. The coping efforts of these wives were primarily directed at actively modifying roles and standards in an attempt to maintain a balance between work and family. Using coping behaviors such as limiting job involvement, modifying work schedules, and planning work changes around family needs suggests that, for these women, the goal is one of accommodating work to family rather than vice versa.

The role of perception as a coping behavior is supported by data from the wives in this study. Perception, as a part of family coping includes the "meaning" the family attaches to the stressful situation and is a significant factor in the Double ABCX Stress Model (McCubbin & Patterson, 1982). Coping Pattern IV which involves maintaining a positive perspective and defining the situation favorably is an important resource to the women in this study and renders empirical support to the cC factor of family perception in the Double ABCX Model.

The results presented here also suggest that each spouse's coping patterns has different effects on family functioning and provide only partial support for the hypothesis of a positive association between husband and wife coping and a "balanced" family system. For women, the utilization of Coping Pattern III, consisting of behaviors which modify roles and standards to maintain a work/family balance appears to be positively related to "balanced" family functioning. The active use of this coping pattern by women, which has as an underlying theme that of accommodating work to family, appears to be significant in most of the findings of this research and, thus, suggests its importance in understanding dual-employed family coping.

The use of Coping Pattern IV by the husbands, and particularly the personal coping behaviors in this pattern directed at planning time for self to exercise, meditate, etc., appears to be negatively related to family balance. This finding highlights the continual struggle experienced by many dual-employed family members who are attempting to balance their commitments to their work, to their families, and to themselves. While behaviors which attend to personal needs and reduce individual stress are important to individual functioning it appears that for this sample, the husbands' use of time for these activities taxes a family system already short on time as a resource and, thus, interferes with family adaptation.

Finally, the results of this study lend empirical support for the use of DECS as a tool for measuring dual-employed family coping behaviors. While the initial factor structure of DECS appears logical and relatively clear, we need to be cautious about assuming that the subscales are stable across all samples. We are pursuing additional data to test the instrument further and suggest that investigators and clinicians use caution in generalizing beyond the limits of this study.

Summary

In this paper, sources of dual-employed family stress were briefly reviewed and previous efforts at identifying coping behaviors were delineated. DECS - Dual-Employed Coping Scales was introduced as a methodological tool for more systematically assessing dual-employed family coping repertoires.

The results of using DECS with a sample of 69 dual-employed couples reveal spousal differences with regard to coping behaviors and patterns. Dual-employed wives utilized significantly more coping behaviors than their husbands with much of their effort focused on accommodating their work to their family. Furthermore, the findings suggest that successful family adaptation for these dual-employed families is related to the wives' attempts to accommodate work to family, while the husbands' use of time for personal coping behaviors such as exercising appears to interfere with family adaptation.

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TABLE 1

FACTOR STRUCTURE FOR DECS*

		Factor Loadings
I.	**Maintaining, Restructuring, and Strengthening the Family System**	
17	Planning for various family relations to occur at a certain regular time each day or week (e.g., "from the time we get home until their bedtime, is the 'children's time'").	.5460
43	Planning schedules out ahead of time (e.g., who takes kid(s) to the doctor; who works late).	.5314
21	Relying on extended family members for encouragement.	.4324
44	Sticking to an established schedule of work and family-related activities.	.4158
38	Planning ahead so that major changes at home (e.g., having a baby) will not disturb our work requirements.	.4109
19	Believing that my working has made me a better spouse than I otherwise would be.	.4103
7	Deciding I will do certain housekeeping tasks at a regular time each week.	.4077
9	Believing that my working has made me a better parent than I otherwise would be.	.3905
13	Making friends with other couples who are both employed outside the home.	.3860
45	Believing that I must excel at both my work and my family roles.	.3655
40	Having good friends whom I can talk to about how I feel.	.3558
42	Believing that, with time, our lifestyle will be easier.	.3509
1	Becoming more efficient; making better use of my time "at home".	.3508
39	Making better use of time at work.	.3223
41	Believing that I need a lot of stimulation and activity to keep from getting bored.	.3130
23	Leaving work and work-related problems at work when I leave at the end of the day.	.2127

*Eigen Values $\geq$ 1.

Table 1 (Continued)

		Factor Loadings
II.	**Procurement of Support to Maintain Family Roles**	
30	Relying on extended family members for childcare help.	.7156
28	Negotiating who stays home with an ill child on a "case by case" basis.	.6869
20	Hiring help to care for the children	.6800
31	Identifying one partner as primarily responsible for childrearing tasks.	.4828
47	Establishing whose role responsibility it is to stay home when child(ren) becomes ill.	.4581
35	Buying more goods and services (as opposed to "do-it-yourself" projects).	.3483
18	Eating out frequently.	.2970
III.	**Modifying Roles & Standards to Maintain a Work/Family Balance**	
4	Limiting job involvement in order to have time for my family.	.5351
10	Leaving some things undone around the house (even though I would like to have them done).	.5031
5	Lowering my standards for "how well" household tasks must be done.	.4495
29	Planning work changes (e.g., transfer, promotion, shift change) around family needs.	.4404
26	Modifying my work schedule (e.g., reducing amount of time at work or working different hours).	.4346
3	Limiting my involvement on the job--saying "no" to some of the things I could be doing.	.4273
11	Eliminating certain activities (home entertaining, volunteer work, etc.).	.4153
27	Having friends at work whom I can talk to about how I feel.	.3920
46	Cutting down on the amount of "outside" activities in which I can be involved.	.3907
8	Buying convenience foods which are easy to prepare at home.	.3860
2	Using modern equipment (e.g., microwave oven, etc.) to help out at home.	.3508
25	Planning for time alone with my spouse	.3310
15	Hiring outside help to assist with our housekeeping and home maintenance	.2531
16	Overlooking the difficulties and focusing on the good things about our lifestyle	.2436

Table 1 (Continued)

		Factor Loadings
IV.	Maintaining a Positive Perspective on the Lifestyle and Reducing Tension & Strains	
33	Believing that, overall, there are more advantages than disadvantages to our lifestyle.	.6141
37	Trying to be flexible enough to fit in special needs and events (e.g., child's concert at school, etc.)	.5862
36	Encouraging our children to help each other out when possible (e.g., homework, rides to activities, etc.)	.5203
48	Maintaining health (eating right, exercising, etc.)	.5144
49	Believing that working is good for my personal growth.	.4741
12	Ignoring criticisms of others about parents who both work outside the home.	.4101
34	Planning time for myself to relieve tensions (jogging, exercising, meditating, etc.).	.4069
32	Believing that we are good "role models" for our children by our both working.	.4053
24	Frequent communication among all family members about individual schedules, needs and responsibilities.	.3816
22	Encouraging our child(ren) to be more self-sufficient, where appropriate	.3803
6	Ignoring comments of how we "should" behave as men and women (e.g., women shouldn't work; men shouldn't clean house).	.3652

TABLE 2

MEANS AND STANDARD DEVIATIONS FOR DECS SCALES

Scale	Number of Items	Wife		Husband	
		Mean	SD	Mean	SD
I. Maintaining Family System	16	54.3	7.6	51.8	8.0
II. Procurement of Support	7	19.6	8.6	17.8	5.3
III. Modifying Roles & Standards	15	53.4	7.9	47.9	8.3
IV. Maintaining Perspective, Reducing Tension	11	46.9	5.5	44.8	5.4
TOTAL		174.3	20.4	162.3	19.1

TABLE 3

INTERCORRELATION MATRIX OF DECS PATTERNS

DECS Patterns	I. Maintaining Family System	II. Procurement of Support	III. Modifying Roles and Standards	IV. Maintaining Perspective, Reducing Tension
I. Maintaining Family System	---	.25	.41	.37
II. Procurement of Support	.25	---	.27	.21
III. Modifying Roles and Standards	.41	.27	---	.28
IV. Maintaining Perspective, Reducing Tension	.37	.21	.28	---

TABLE 4

Comparison of Wives' and Husbands'
Coping Patterns

Coping Pattern	Wife Mean	Husband Mean	F	p*
I. Maintaining Family System	54.3	51.6	3.29	.0721
II. Procurement of Support	19.6	17.8	2.11	.1487
III. Modifying Roles and Standards	53.4	47.9	14.28	.0002*
IV. Maintaining Perspective, Reducing Tension	46.9	44.8	4.38	.0384*
Total	174.3	162.3	11.32	.001*

*$p \leq .05$ accepted

TABLE 5

Wives vs. Husbands on Coping Pattern III: Modifying Roles and Standards to Maintain a Work/Family Balance

Coping Behavior	Wife Mean	Husband Mean	F	p*
4. Limiting job involvement in order to have time for my family.	3.88	3.22	13.69	.0003
5. Lowering my standards for how well household tasks must be done.	3.73	3.16	7.90	.0058
10. Leaving some things undone around the house (even though I would like to have them done).	4.17	3.48	14.49	.0002
25. Planning for time alone with my spouse.	3.95	3.59	3.84	.0524
26. Modifying my work schedule (i.e., reducing amount of time at work or working different hours).	3.36	2.79	5.80	.0175
27. Having friends at work whom I can talk to about how I feel.	4.13	3.89	11.55	.0009
29. Planning work changes (e.g., transfer, promotion, shift change) around family needs.	3.68	3.62	6.86	.0099

*$p \leq .05$ accepted

TABLE 6

Wives vs. Husbands on Coping Pattern IV: Maintaining a Positive Perspective on the Lifestyle and Reducing Tension and Strains

	Coping Behavior	Wife Mean	Husband Mean	F	p*
33.	Believing that, overall, there are more advantages than disadvantages to our lifestyle.	4.50	4.14	3.84	.0524
36.	Encouraging our children to help each other out when possible (e.g., homework, rides, etc.).	4.68	4.29	9.95	.0020
37.	Trying to be flexible enough to fit in special needs and events (e.g., child's concert at school, etc.).	4.64	4.31	7.13	.0058
49.	Believing that working is good for my personal growth.	4.50	4.25	3.83	.0526

*$p \leq .05$ accepted